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Mrs. Pickett's Missionary Box

BY

ALICE M. EDDY

Literature Department of the
Woman's Board of Home Missions of the
Presbyterian Church
156 Fifth Avenue, New York

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Benefits at a Cent Apiece.

"That there missionary box," said Mrs. Pickett, surveying it, with her head on one side, as it stood in state on the best parlor mantel, "that there missionary box is worth its weight in gold two or three times over to me. You'd never believe it, Mis' Malcolm, the things I've been a-learnin' of, ever since Mary Pickett, she brought it home, or rather the mate to it, an' sot it out on the dinin'-room shelf an' told me she'd brought me a present from meetin'."

"Do tell me about it," said the new minister's wife, with girlish pleasure at the prospect of a story.

"I've a notion to," replied her hostess. "You've got a real drawin'-out way with you, Mis' Malcolm. Some way you make me think of Mary Pickett herself, that was the beginnin' of it all; she that's a missionary to Turkey now—my niece, you know. You've got just her colored hair and you're light complected like her, and you laugh something like her, too. Mary Pickett always was a mas-

ter hand for laughin'. I remember how she laughed that afternoon when she came in with them two boxes and sot mine on the shelf out there. She knowed I warn't the missionary kind. I do' no but she done it for a joke. It was five years ago, you know, and I was scrapin' along with my boarders, an' rents was high an' livin' higher, an' I had hard enough times to make both ends meet, I can tell you, though it warn't half as hard times as I thought it was. I was that down-hearted that everything looked criss-cross to me, an' I got to have hard feelin's against every one't looked 's if they got along easier'n me, 'n I most giv' up goin' to church at all, for all I was a professor, an' I won't say but what I had murmurin's against Providence—fact is I *know* I had —if you *be* a minister's wife! An' so it was work, work, from one week's end to another, an' I never thought of nothin' else. Then Mary Pickett she come home from school, where she'd been ever since she was fifteen, for she took all the money her pa left her to get on edication, so'st to teach; an' she got a place in the grammar school an' come to board with me, an' she'd heard about missions to that school till she was full of 'em, and the very fust meetin' day after she come, she walked out in the kitchen, an' says she:

"'Aunty, ain't you comin' to missionary meetin' down to the church?' says she. 'I'll meet you there after school,' says she.

"An' if you'll believe me, Mis' Malcolm, I was that rilled that I could have shook her! I says:

"'Pretty doin's 'twould be for me to go traipsin' off to meetin's an' leave the i'nin' an' the cookin' an' set alongside o' Lawyer Stapleton's wife hearin' about—the land knows

what! Folks had better stay to home and see to their work,' says I. But law! nothin' ever made Mary Pickett answer back. She just laughed and said 'Good bye,' an' I stayed an' puttered over the kitchen work till I was as hot as fire inside an' out; an' long about five o'clock, back she come with them two boxes.

"'I've brought you a present, Aunt Mirandy,' says she, settin' of it down, an' when I see what it was, I jest stood an' stared. Twarn't that one there, 'twas one jest like it, an' it had a motto written to one end, 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits to me?'

"'Well, you're smart,' says I, an' Mary she jest dropped into a chair an' laughed till I couldn't help laughin' too. 'Great benefits I have,' says I, standin' with my arms akimbo an' lookin' that box all over.

"'Guess the heathen won't get much out o' me at that rate!'

"'I s'pose that depends on how much you render,' says Mary, says she. 'You might try at a cent apiece awhile, jest for the fun of it. Nobody knows who's got this motto, you know, an' even a few cents would be some help,' says she.

"'Bout's many as grapes off of bean vines, I'd get!' says I, for I was more than usual low-spirited that night, an' I jest made up my mind I *would* keep count, just to show myself how little I did have. 'Them few cents won't break me,' I thought, an' I really seemed to kinder enjoy thinkin over the hard times I had, while I was settin' the table, with Mary helpin', an' I kep' sayin' little mean things, about how I s'posed she wanted me to put in a cent for the smoky stove, an' for the bread that warn't light, so't I knew all the boarders would be grumblin' at supper, and

plenty more in that line, that she never took no notice of. Mis' Stapleton said once that Mary was a girl of great tact, an' I guess I know it better'n any one else.

"Well, the box sot there all that week, an' I used to say it must be kinder lonesome with nothin' in it, for not a cent went in till next missionary meetin' day. I was settin' on the back steps, gettin' a breath of fresh air, when Mary come home, an' I called out to her to know what them geese talked about to-day. That was the livin' word I called 'em—'them geese!' Well, she come and set down along o' me an' begun to tell me about the meetin', an' it was all about Injy an' the widders there, poor creturs, an' they bein' abused an' starved an' not let to think for themselves—you know all about it better'n I do—an' before I thought I up an' said:

"'Well, if I *be* a widder, I'm thankful I'm where I can earn my own livin', an' no thanks to nobody an' no one to interfere!'

"Then Mary she laughed an' said there was my fust benefit. Well, that sorter tickled me, for I thought a woman must be pretty hard up for benefits when she had to go clear off to Injy to find 'em, an' I dropped in one cent, and it rattled round a few days without any company. I used to shake it every time I passed by the shelf, an' the thought of them poor things in Injy kep' a comin' up before me, an' I really was glad when I got a new boarder for my best room, an' felt as if I'd oughter put in another. An' next meetin' Mary she told me about Japan, an' I thought about that till I put in another because I warn't a Jap. An' all the while I felt kinder proud of how little there was in that box. Then one day when I got a chance to turn a little penny sellin' eggs, which I warn't in

the habit of, Mary brought the box in where I was countin' of money, an' says:

"'A penny for your benefit, Aunt Mirandy,' an' I says:

"'This a'n't the Lord's benefit;' an' she answered:

"'If 'ta'n't His, whose is it?' an' she begun to hum over something out of one of the poetry books that she was always readin' of:

'God's grace is the only grace,
And all grace is the grace of God.'

"Well, I dropped in a penny, and them words kep' ringin' in my ears, till I couldn't help puttin' more to it on account of some other things I never thought of callin' the Lord's benefits before. An' by that time, what with Mary's telling me about the meetins', and me most always findin' somethin' to put in a penny for, to be thankful that I warn't it, an' what with gettin' interested about it all, an' sorter searchin' round a little now an' then, to think of somethin' or other to put in a cent for, there really come to be quite a few pennies in the box, an' it didn't rattle near so much when I shook it. An' then one day, Mary she brought me a little purplish pamphlet, an' she says:

"'Aunty, here's a missionary magazine I've subscribed to for you, bein' you're so interested in missions.'

"Me interested in missions! But when I come to think it over to myself, kinder curious, to see how it sounded, it was jest what they said about Mis' Stapleton, she't was the president of the missionary society. An' that night our new boarder he picked up the magazine, an' said:

"'Why, what's this?' An' I said, quite pleased, before I thought:

"'That's a magazine that my niece, Mary

Pickett, she subscribed to for me, bein' I'm so interested in missions.'

"'My mother used to take it,' said he. He was a young man, not much more'n a boy, an' homesick, I guess. 'I'd like to look it over, if you don't mind,' he says. 'It looks like home.' So I was so pleased to hear him say that, for the boarders they don't most generally say much, except to find fault, that when I went out in the dinin'-room, I jes' put another cent in for the magazine itself, part for what I'd been readin' out of it, and Mary she come up behind me an' gave me a big hug.

"'You dear old inconsistent thing!' she says, and then I knew she'd heard what I'd said in the parlor.

"Well, it went on that way for quite awhile, an' it come to be a regular thing that a cent would get in there every time I heard about the meetin'. I thought Mary would a died laughin' the time I put one in because I warn't born a cannibal—an' one day—I'll never forget that day, Mis' Malcolm—she was a tellin' me about Turkey, an' she told how some missionaries heard a little girl sayin' how the smallest things in all the world wa'n't any smaller than the joy of her father when she was born. Them words went right through me. I was standin' over the i'nin-board, and Mary was opposite to me, but all of a sudden, instead of her, I seemed to see my Liakim's face, that had been dead ten years, an' him a-leanin' down over our little baby, that only lived two weeks—the only one I ever had. Seemed to me I couldn't get over it, when that baby died. An' I seemed to see Liakim smilin' down at it, an' it lyin there all soft an' white—she was a white little baby—such a pretty baby—an' before I knew it, I was droppin' tears all over

the starched clothes, an' I turned round an' went an' put another cent in that box, for the look on Liakim's face when he held her that time. An' Mary, she see somethin' was the matter, I guess, for she walked off an' never asked no questions. But all the rest of the day I kep' seein' that little face before me an' thinkin' how I'd had her for my own an' how I knew she was in glory—I'd only felt it hard that I couldn't keep her before that—an' before I went to bed I went out in the dinin'-room, an' I put in a little bright five-cent piece for my baby, because I couldn't bear to count her just like everythin' else, an' I found myself cryin' because I hadn't enough money just then to spare anythin' bigger. I suppose it was from thinkin' about her so much, that that night I dreamed about mother. I could see her as plain, an' father with her, an' we was back on the old farm, an' while I was kissin' of 'em both I heard some one sayin', 'As one whom his mother comforteth.' An' I woke up, an' I was sayin', 'O Lord, I am a wicked, ungrateful woman!'

"Mis' Malcolm, I don't suppose you could understand—you that's a minister's wife, an' thankful to the Lord in course—what I thought that night. I laid awake, thinkin' and cryin', an' yet not all sorry, for half the night. I kept thinkin' of all the things the Lord had ever done for me, an' the more I thought of mother an' the old home, the softer my heart seemed to grow, an' I jest prayed with all my might an' main, an' that there box weighed on my mind like lead. 'A cent apiece!' I kep' sayin'. 'A cent apiece for all His benefits!' Why they come over me that night while I laid there prayin', till they were like crowds an' crowds of angels all round me. In the mornin' I went up to the box feelin' meaner

than dirt, an' I put in a cent for mother, an' a cent for father, an' one for the old farm, an' the rose-bush in front of my window, an' one for my little pet lamb that made me so happy when I was a girl, an' for heaps of other things that I'd been forgettin' in them hard times. An' when I couldn't spare no more, I went to work, an' do believe I was a different woman after that. For there was the verses in the Bible that I used to get up early to read them mornin's, an' there was the love of God that I'd never rightly understood, an' there was church that I couldn't bear to miss now, an' there was the daily bread that I'd never thought of bein' thankful for till after that night when I found out how much I'd had in my life an' begun to look about me for what I had now. And so it went on, till the box grew heavier an' heavier, an' before the day come for it to be opened, three months from the time I'd had it, it was all full, and I stuck in one cent into the slit at the top, an' said:

"'That's for you, Mary Pickett, for if ever I had a benefit from the Lord, you're one!' and Mary she cried when I said it.

"So when the day come, I said I was goin' too, an' I left the i'nin', an' we went off together, an' there was singin' and everythin' jest as there always is, only it was all new to me, an' every one seemed as glad to see me as if I'd been as rich as any of 'em, an' at las' it come time to open our boxes. An' I brought mine, an' I says, 'Mis' Stapleton,' I says, 'if ever there was a mean-feelin' woman come to missionary meetin', I'm the one; for I've been a-keepin' count of my mercies, at a cent apiece,' I says. 'It's all cents there, 'cept one five-cent piece, that means somethin' special to me. An' I wouldn't let myself put in more,'

I says, beginnin' to cry, 'for when I began to find out what I had to be thankful for, I says to myself, 'Mean you'd oughter feel, an' mean you *shall* feel! You'll jest finish up this here box the way you begun! An' here 'tis,' I says, 'an' every cent is one of the Lord's mercies.' So I set down, cryin' like a baby, an' Mis' Stapleton she begun to count, with the tears a-runnin' down on her own cheeks, and before she got through, we was all cryin' together, for there was three hundred and fifty blessed cents in that box, not counting the little five-cent piece, that nobody knew what it meant.

"'An' now,' says I, 'for mercy's sake, give me another box, but don't let it have that motto on it, for I believe it will break my heart!'"

"So they give me this one, with 'The love of Christ constraineth us' on it, an' Mis' Barnes, that was the minister's wife then, she prayed for us all about havin' thankful hearts, an' lovin' the Lord for what He's done for us, an' I went home with the new box, that's standing there on the shelf, and life's been a different thing to me sence that day, Mis' Malcolm, my dear, an' that's why that missionary box is worth its weight in gold."

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